



JUSTIN WHITMEL EARLEY

MADE FOR PEOPLE

WHY WE DRIFT INTO
LONELINESS AND HOW
TO FIGHT FOR A LIFE
OF FRIENDSHIP

A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK

ZONDERVAN BOOKS

Made for People

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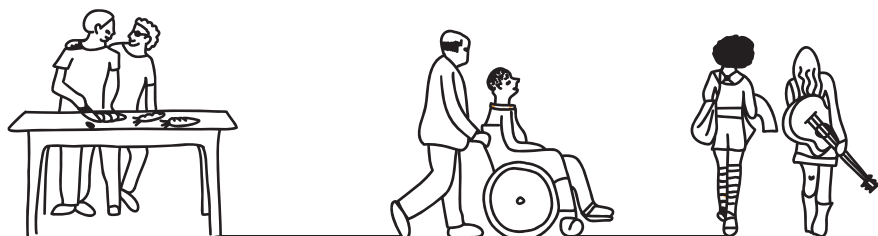
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Introduction

You Were Made for People

THE ART AND HABIT OF FRIENDSHIP



1. VULNERABILITY



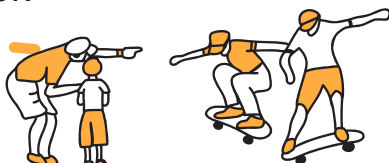
2. HONESTY



5. INVITATION



8. COMMUNICATION



9. MEMORY



3. COVENANT



4. FORGIVENESS



6. GEOGRAPHY



7. TIME



10. WORSHIP



CHAPTER 1 _____

Vulnerability

The Art of Living without Secrets
and the Habit of Confession



SHARING

I'm struggling in
my marriage.

I'm really stressed
out at work.

I'm struggling with passion
in my walk with God.

My wife and I are going
through a rough patch.

VULNERABILITY

Our shouting woke up the
kids last night, and someone
threw something.

I'm taking pills to fall asleep
because otherwise, I
can't settle down.

Ever since I read that book,
I'm starting to think that this
whole faith is maybe a fiction.

I'm flirting with a colleague
on a text chain.



CHAPTER 2

Honesty

The Art of Saying What You Mean and the
Habits of Rebuke and Encouragement



Habits for Honest Conversation

PRACTICE THE TURN IN CONVERSATION

Many of my great friends have the same habit. After twenty minutes of conversation, they say something like “So, how are you?” This is a bit of a speed bump, but it separates the casual conversation of acquaintances from the deep, honest conversation of friends. You will develop your own words for turning conversations, but practice taking the turn as much as possible.

PURSUE SMALL GATHERINGS

I love large gatherings. Whether it is a feast with friends, a big party, or a church conference, there is an energy that is irreplaceable. That said, ideally, such large gatherings should catalyze smaller ones where honest conversation can happen. Think about this in your church. You want people to be pushed toward intimacy, not anonymity. Services should push people to small groups. Small groups should push people to accountability groups. Even in your friend circles, be sure to look for times where smaller conversations can happen and honesty can be pursued.

LEAVE SPACE IN ACTIVITY TIMES

Many of your friendships may be based on shared activities. Volunteering together, working together, or going to the gym together can be the real basis for beautiful friendships. But do not let shared activity displace the soul-deep need for honest conversation. Plan a coffee after the run. Schedule a happy hour after work. Have a breakfast before you go to volunteer. Or perhaps center your hang-out around a long walk. These habits of leaving space for conversation turn good companions into real friends.

PRACTICE ASKING QUESTIONS (AND THEN BE QUIET)

One of the great arts of honest friendships is asking good questions. Often this can be combined with the habit of making the turn in conversation. But I encourage you to practice asking a good question and then being quiet and listening. Too many questions can suffocate, but one good question plus a listening ear creates the soil of conversation where vulnerability and honesty can grow.*

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EXAMPLES FOR PROMPTING LOVING REBUKES

Sometimes this kind of conversation can be so foreign to our modern tongues that we don't know where to start. Here are some examples to start:

- "I would caution you to look out for . . ."
- "I have noticed you keep saying . . ."
- "Be careful, friend, because . . ."
- "I think you may be missing . . ."
- "This doesn't sound like you at your best . . ."

EXAMPLES FOR PROMPTING ENCOURAGEMENT

Here are some examples of ways to make encouragement normal in conversation:

- "I am always so impressed that you . . ."
- "I'm inspired by the way you . . ."
- "You are so good at . . ."
- "I see the Lord working in you . . ."
- "You did so well when you . . ."

* For fascinating research on asking good questions and how they can lead us into honesty and relationship, see Warren Berger's *The Book of Beautiful Questions* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 103.



CHAPTER 3

Covenant

The Art of Commitment and the
Habit of Making Promises



ACQUAINTANCE OR COMPANION	COVENANT FRIENDSHIP	MARRIAGE
Either Sex	Usually Same Sex	Man and Woman
No Vulnerability	Strictly Emotional Vulnerability	Emotional and Sexual Vulnerability
No Commitment	Moves Toward Covenant	Complete and Lifelong Covenant
Completely Inclusive	Balances Exclusive and Inclusive	Completely Exclusive
Expects No Sacrifice	Expects Significant Sacrifice	Expects Lifelong Sacrifice
You May Gain Something from the Relationship	The Gain is the Relationship Itself	The Gain is the Relationship Itself



The Next Step toward Covenant Friendship

Kind of Friendship

LIFELONG FRIENDS WHO LIVE NEARBY

If you have very close friends who live in the same town with you, my suggestion is to consider naming those relationships as covenant friendships to push them deeper. This may happen by conversation, by committing to read this book together and discuss it, or even by writing and signing a covenant (more on that later). But find some way to name the future you want to pursue together.

THOSE YOU RARELY SEE OR LIVE FAR FROM

You may have friends you are very close to but rarely see. Perhaps this is a life stage, or perhaps you live far away. My suggestion in these kinds of relationships is to move toward covenant by naming a routine. This could be a monthly phone call or a seasonal gathering. But holding to a ritual of friendship can move you toward a covenant friendship even when it happens only once in a while. This is true of some of my covenant friends, such as Barrett. Now our relationship subsists mainly on a quarterly hangout. We call it our quarterly cocktail. But even though Barrett and I get together only a couple of times a year, we have found that a lightning bolt of friendship comes with the commitment to be honest and intentional, even when it's occasional.

THOSE WHO DON'T FOLLOW JESUS

You may have close friends who do not know Jesus. I pray you do. I often have people ask me, "Can these, too, be covenant friendships?" My answer is a joyful yes. With those friends, despite not sharing your most important thing in common—Jesus—there is nonetheless tremendous enjoyment, mutual respect, brotherhood, sisterhood, or shared history. The fact that they do not follow Jesus should not prevent you from "fully knowing and loving anyway." "Fully knowing" is a continual opportunity for natural and organic evangelism (more on that in chapter 5). But even without such words, you get the opportunity to "be Christ"

(continued)

The Next Step toward Covenant Friendship

Kind of Friendship

THOSE WHO DON'T FOLLOW JESUS

to someone who doesn't know him. Further, these friends also hold you and bear the gift of Christ to you even if they don't know the name of the gift they bring.

Therefore, my suggestion is to give them the gift of commitment by naming the friendship. Even if this is just a conversation where you say out loud how they have been like Christ to you, such naming could be an incredible blessing to them, and perhaps, you can pray, a breadcrumb along the path of their realizing that Christ is at the root of all friendship even for those who don't know him yet.

PEOPLE YOU NO LONGER SEE

There are also friends with whom you walked for some time as covenant friends but no longer see. This may be because of a move or because of a change in life stage or something else entirely. Simply because you no longer see such a friend does not mean that the friendship has failed. Cherishing a past friendship that you no longer live into may be a sign that the friendship served you well and moved you to the next place of life.

While it is sad to see a covenant friendship move into the past, you do not have to feel shame or guilt as if you did anything wrong. When we lose contact with a covenant friend, we can acknowledge our limitations as human beings and cherish the past. You will see them again and have plenty of evenings to savor together in the kingdom to come. (More on leaving friendships in chap. 4.)

Consider calling or visiting or writing that person to name the friendship they gave you and to thank and encourage them for it. This was my goal in the conversation with Ken I wrote about in chapter 2, and this kind of naming could be an incredible Ebenezer in your relationship, even if there is little chance you'll be spending regular time together in the future.

FAMILY MEMBERS

Your family is paradoxically both the easiest and the hardest place to pursue covenant friendships.

The easy may be obvious. There are, sometimes, gifts of family members. Siblings you grew up with who know you

(continued)

The Next Step toward Covenant Friendship

Kind of Friendship

FAMILY MEMBERS

inside and out and you can share anything with. A brother or a sister who is also your best friend and always will be. These gifts may be rare, but they are real, and they are, in some ways, a shining model of covenant friendship.

But usually, making friends out of family is very difficult. This is important to reiterate. It is not longevity, or proximity, that is the hallmark of friendship. If that were true, our siblings and parents and spouses would always be our best friends. Instead, it is often hardest to enter into real friendship with family members. Quantity and history of time together can be baggage as much as it is a gift. This suggests that with family members, there still may be a lot of work to do to move toward real vulnerability and really loving one another despite all your flaws (which are usually on display with family).

If you have a family member with whom you want to move toward covenant friendship, consider having one of those hard, watershed conversations where you try to be vulnerable about what you long for with them. Do not tell them what they need to do differently but rather what you hope for in that relationship. Start the vulnerability. Often we have the commitment part with family members, but we lack the true vulnerability part.

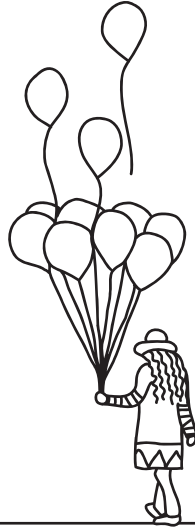
CHURCH COMMUNITIES

My working assumption is that church communities and covenant friendships are interwoven. Like a building constructed with strong bars of steel, I believe covenant friendships are uniquely supportive of the larger church community. They are distinct from the whole but an integral part of the whole. We should be mindful of how church programs can funnel people into smaller gatherings that enable the possibility of covenant friendships. No church program can create covenant friendships for you, but you can serve your church mightily by being the kind of person who seeks covenant friendships within the community you already have.

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The Next Step toward Covenant Friendship

There may be plenty of friendships in your life that don't fit any of the previous categories. You're not sure where they're headed. That is fine. Relationships usually defy categorization. My suggestion is to pick one that you are encouraged by and make a gesture of covenant. Perhaps you give a gift that cannot be used until the future—a bottle of wine to be opened later or tickets to a concert a year from now. Maybe you suggest a family vacation together or plan a party together. Gestures of covenant, no matter how small, may change things far more than you think.



CHAPTER 4

Forgiveness

The Art of Failure and the
Habit of Forgiving

IF:	REMEMBER:
<p>Their hard life circumstances make them less available</p>	<p>Children, a difficult job season, marriage problems, physical suffering, and emotional trauma all will make it very hard for people to be the friends they want to be, but don't leave just because things are hard. Hard life circumstances are the soil of—not the barrier to—friendship. Work through those things.</p>
<p>They say or do something dumb or offensive, online or elsewhere</p>	<p>All of us make horrible mistakes. It is the mark of a Pharisee, not a Christian, to break off ties because someone becomes “immoral.” It makes us less like Christ—not more—to distance ourselves because we have discovered a flaw in someone else. If their words or actions are preventing them from friendship, then we may be in the previous category. But if they are just offending your moral sensibilities, don't turn your nose up at another human being. We are all terribly flawed people—but God loves us anyway. So we can too.</p>
<p>Their suffering makes them continually sad to be around</p>	<p>All of us, at some point in our lives, and some of us much more and for much longer than others, encounter suffering that drives us into the dirt. We have a difficult time experiencing joy, depression overwhelms, and we aren't much fun to be around. That is when we need the soft faithfulness of friends more than ever. A true friend will say, “I will walk with you, even though I may have to carry you.” Don't mistake the hard seasons of relationship for the end of relationship. Those seasons will make you more loving in the end.</p>

An illustration at the top of the page shows three stylized figures on bicycles. The first figure is a person in a white shirt and dark pants. The second figure is a person in a white shirt and dark pants with a backpack. The third figure is a person in a white shirt and dark pants with a backpack and a yellow helmet. Above them are several black birds in flight. The text 'CHAPTER 5' is positioned to the left of the bicycles, with a horizontal line extending from the end of the text across the page.

CHAPTER 5

Invitation

The Art of Open Circles and
the Habit of Inclusion



Ideas for Practicing Open Circles

OPEN CIRCLES

Think in open circles, whether you're sitting around a fire or a table or in the corner of a room. Consider how you can arrange your bodies physically to suggest a relational truth—others are welcome to come and talk to you.

EXTRA CHAIRS

When you host or eat, consider the idea of an extra chair. Whether you plan ahead of time and invite someone new or are simply open to a last-minute guest, the habit of keeping an extra chair signals a readiness for new friends.

HABITS OF GREETING

It is impossible to underestimate the power of greeting someone new. These are (ideally) the things that your mom or dad taught you. And if they didn't, learn them now. When you see someone new, look them in the eye, shake their hand, share your name, and ask for theirs. We tend to remember the beginning and the end of gatherings (we'll talk about this more in the chapter on memory), so the kindness of coming to greet someone by name and then saying goodbye to them by name when you leave is one of the simplest and sturdiest foundations for being relationally open.

INTRODUCTIONS

If you are hosting, make a point to introduce new people. I learned this from my father. When we have a newcomer to a family meal, my dad will inevitably at some point, usually before we eat, ask for everyone's attention and introduce how our guest came to be here, explain why they should be honored as a guest, and thank them for coming. This may put some people on the spot, but consider how such an introduction creates a moment for everyone to have shared knowledge and expectation—that this guest is honored and welcome not just to the house but to future relationship.

(continued)

CURATED GATHERINGS

One wonderful habit is to gather people who “should” know one another. In China, we started a club called the Shanghai Feast Society. We would send anonymous invitations to groups of five or six people we thought should be friends and then treat them to a generous dinner and try to spark conversation. This is far on the formal end, but it was an incredible way to catalyze new relationships. More recently, I think of a time when I invited an old best friend to sit around a fire with a new young friend and try to make a connection. Whether formally or casually, consider inviting new people together on purpose.

NAME TAGS

One way we try to signal relational openness in our church community group is by making a habit of wearing name tags. Of course, we generally do not need them. We’re the same fifteen to twenty people who show up over and over. But the week when someone new shows up, name tags make it so easy for that new person to feel like it’s normal not to know everyone’s name.

CARING

Some people may feel they are too far on the edge to accept an invitation to join a hang out or a small group. I have noticed that caring for those people in their times of need can be a wonderful way to open your circle and extend love. Once when we were new to our church, a friend named Lyric spontaneously brought us homemade bread because she heard about something difficult that happened in our lives. I’ll never forget how much I felt invited in by that. Whether it’s helping someone move or sending meals when someone’s sick, acts of care extended from a friend group can be a powerful way to signal invitation without words.

FOLLOW-UP TEXTS

One way you may try to catalyze and foster new relationships is by sending a text to multiple people after a new hangout, introducing the new person’s phone number (assuming you think they would *like* this) and sharing the names and numbers of other people they met. Often this is a simple and kind way to follow up and give a newcomer a touch point for the next step in relationship.

CHAPTER 7



Time

The Art of Time and the
Habit of Scheduling



WEEKLY COFFEE

Before I had young children (who, in this phase of life, demand most of my morning time), I had various weekly coffees set up with friends where we checked in, talked about life, shared problems, prayed for each other, and enjoyed the morning air. Setting up a weekly coffee for a season with a friend is a tremendous way to spark a deeper level of friendship.

WEEKLY FIREPIT

This is what my friends defaulted to during the pandemic season, and it went such a long way to sustaining us during a difficult time. Not everyone came every week, of course, but establishing a rhythm and expectation during that time that the guys would meet on Saturday (and giving our wives an opportunity to do the same on Friday) became an anchor of relationship during a time when it was very easy to drift down the current of loneliness.

EVERY-OTHER-WEEK PORCH NIGHT

In difficult seasons of life, anything weekly might be too much. My friends Matt and Steve and I wish we were getting together every week, but the reality is that aiming for every other week is more realistic right now. During the writing of this book, we've sat on my porch every other Tuesday night and done a radical thing: told the truth about our lives.

WEEKLY CHECK-IN CALL

I also have weekly touch points with at least two friends right now in the form of brief calls or emails, where we share how certain things are going. Some of this is accountability. Never underestimate the power of friendship in accountability rhythms. We never change alone, but we often change together.

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QUARTERLY COCKTAILS

I mentioned earlier that I have friends whom I don't often hang out with but nonetheless consider dear friends and want to see regularly. Remember: regular does not have to mean frequent. For the past two years I've had a quarterly cocktail evening that has allowed me and two other friends to catch up even though we go long seasons without much more. Whether it's a quarterly cocktail, cookout, or coffee—whatever you bond over, set a rhythm for it.

MONTHLY SLEEPOVER

Early in my marriage to Lauren, we realized that hanging out with my sister and her husband (who got married six months before us) was lifegiving because we could all process our young marriages together. In our young twenties and only one city away, we decided that once a month driving the hour to where they lived and sleeping over for an evening was a rhythm we should commit to. Just last month, we got our families together (now a combined eight children between us) for a weekend and reminisced on how those monthly sleepovers were such a lifeline of friendship for us in that time. If you're in a phase where that is an option, then intertwine your lives with others for a season.

SECOND TUESDAY OF EVERY OTHER MONTH GET-TOGETHER

This is a mouthful, I know. And that is the point. Sometimes, something off the wall makes sense. I have a friendship now that is part mentorship and part friendship, and this friend asked if we could find some regular rhythm to spending time together. I knew we couldn't do every month, but every quarter seemed like too little for what we were hoping to accomplish, so for about a year now we've attempted to hang out the second Tuesday of every other month. Despite the strangeness of that schedule, it's amazing what the Lord has done in those meetings over the past year. He has continued to knit together a bond of friendship that gives us both life. No matter how odd the rhythm, expect the Lord to be faithful to honor it.

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THURSDAY DINNER

Our family is currently in a yearslong rhythm with our friend Drew, who joins us for family dinner every week. In *Habits of the Household*, I write at length about how opening your home regularly can be a way of practicing a rhythm of hospitality. If you're in a stage with a lot of kids, like we are, consider the simple art of opening the mess of your home regularly as a way to practice friendship as a family. Friendship is messy; your house can be too. It's the rhythm, not the neatness, that matters.

MONDAY LUNCH

I currently meet with a great friend who is about a decade younger than me every Monday at 1:30 p.m. to talk about how he is growing with the Lord. You might call this discipleship. You might call it life coaching of the spiritual variety. That's the wonderful thing about friendship: it has the capacity to be many of these things. He doesn't drink coffee, and I usually bring lunch, but 1:30 p.m. on Mondays is the time we meet up anyway and talk about what the Lord is doing in his life. It's been amazing to see the way the Lord has used that time, and I couldn't be more grateful to get a seat to watch what the Holy Spirit is doing once a week.



CHAPTER 10

Worship

The Art of Worship and the Habits
of Communal Spiritual Disciplines



Ways to Interweave Scripture into Friendships

COMMON READING PLANS

At times I've read through devotionals with friends so that the morning themes can come up in conversation. In certain seasons of the church calendar, our congregation will do the same. Currently many of my friends read from the Book of Common Prayer both because it helps make a habit of Scripture reading and because it gives us a common reading that can be discussed.

THEMATIC VERSES

For a long time I had an email chain with friends where the automatic signature block was a paraphrase of Psalm 133, "How good and pleasant when brothers dwell together in unity." Now I have a text chain with Steve and Matt titled "Three Strands" (Eccl. 4:12). Both of these serve as reminders that Scripture is the heartbeat and foundation of our friendships.

GROUP DEVOTIONS

Attending the same Bible study may seem obvious. If you are in a small group with friends, then diving into the Scriptures together can and should be normal. However, the reality for me is that I'm not in a small group with most of my friends. So Scripture has to be intentionally brought in. While our cabin weekends are few and far between in this season, when we do have one there will be some time of prayer and Scripture reading that helps call us to center.

TEXTING SCRIPTURE

My friend Drew is so good at texting out a Scripture he may be praying for you. My friends and I also have a text chain (the one I mentioned earlier) where prayer requests and verses are shared. This helps make it easy and normal to punctuate our ongoing conversation with occasional mentions of Scriptures that have moved us. It gives us a place to put this special kind of conversation.



Habits to Interweave Prayer into Friendships

TEXT CHAINS

I recommend passing prayer requests as often as possible on whatever regular communication chains you have—email, social media apps, texts, or otherwise. I even suggest having a chain dedicated to prayer requests so anyone can feel like they can send something anytime. I also heartily endorse my friends' habit of saying "Just prayed for you" instead of "I will pray for you" as a way to let prayer interrupt your day.

NOTEBOOKS

I have at times kept a notebook of prayer requests for friends. While I don't have one now, I enjoy going back and reading years later what I was praying about for them. I did this the other day, and it was a remarkable moment to praise God for the requests that were answered.

EMERGENCY MEETINGS

In occasional moments of crisis, my friends and I have called gatherings at one another's houses to pray about someone or something. These are very difficult moments, usually marked with darkness and suffering, but in my memory they become very dear moments. As I look back, they seem like real evidence of Psalm 23. That though we have walked through the valley of the shadow of death, he has been with us, particularly as we have gathered for prayer.

BENEDICTIONS

It is not unusual that after a meaningful or deep or vulnerable evening of conversation with my friends, someone will suggest we close in prayer. I so appreciate this as a norm. Usually we need the benediction of prayer to send us on from conversations like that, and making it a norm is one small way to punctuate your friendships with prayer. Be brave (and awkward) enough to offer to be the one to close a conversation in prayer.

(continued)

CHRISTMAS CARDS

Recently my wife, Lauren, suggested that we keep all the Christmas cards people send us next to our family Bible. On family devotion nights the kids pick someone out of the stack and pray for them during the week. This has been a special way to turn the annual notes passed back and forth into a recurring rhythm of intentional prayer for other families.

BEDTIME PRAYERS

I cannot recommend enough the habit of short, bedside prayers. Often it is in the evening when the weight of the day hits me. It is then that I remember the difficult news I may have heard. It is good, then, to close the day reminding ourselves that we and our friends rest in God's hands and not our own. Make a habit of kneeling by your bed to pray for rest and for friends, and it just may become a lifetime habit of prayer.